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○ Issue 02 | ○ Winter 2017

# APR *Prime*

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE,  
SUSTAINING OUR FUTURE

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## Providing key information on the APR Program

### Commissioners Column:

Welcome to APR Prime, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources newsletter dedicated to providing you with updates on the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

The APR program is entering middle age. This year will mark 40 years since the legislation was passed that led to the creation of the program. In that time we have permanently protected almost 900 farms and over 70,000 acres. While we are proud of our accomplishments over these four decades, this is also time to contemplate the future of the program. I am very interested in hearing from you, the APR landowners, about your thoughts on APR to understand what we can do further to help you maintain your farm as an economically viable and environmentally sound unit. We recently held a listening session at the Farm Bureau annual meeting in December and just last month at the Ag Com Roundtable in South Deerfield. We hope to attend more meetings over the year to listen to your comments. Details on meetings for the upcoming year will be posted in our Farm & Market Report. If you would like to be notified directly, subscribe to our APR email list at: [www.mass.gov/apr](http://www.mass.gov/apr).

This newsletter describes some of the work that we have conducted with Michael Kosinski in Westfield through our APR Improvement Program funds to help with his plans for a new grain dryer, grain cleaner, and grain bin for his operation. We also describe where to start when you are selling land subject to an APR. APR documents may vary depending on the year the APR was executed. It's important to read your APR document and understand the terms. If you can't find a copy, just contact us and we will send you one.

I am pleased to announce a new program available to APR farmers, the Stewardship and Restoration on APRs (SARA) program. This program is open to farmers who own or operate land placed under the APR program who wish to improve utilization of the land for commercial agriculture. More information about this program is presented in this newsletter. **Note that the deadline for applications is this coming March 20.**

Our grants are described in this newsletter and the next round of grant funding will become available over the next few months. Please make sure you are on our email list to know when they are released.

Wishing you the best for the upcoming growing season and hope to see you down on the farm

**John Lebeaux**  
*Commissioner*

## Grant Opportunities

Applications are available usually in early spring

1. **Farm Energy Discount Program**: discounts on electricity and natural gas bills of 10% to eligible entities engaged in commercial agriculture.

2. **Ag-Energy Grant (Ag-Energy)**: funding projects either for renewable energy or for energy efficiency.

3. **APR Improvement Program (AIP)**: business planning assistance and grants for infrastructure improvements to help sustain active commercial farming on land already protected through APR Program.

4. **Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)**: offers non-APR farmers funding, technical and business planning assistance to expand, upgrade and modernize their existing operations.

5. **Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs Program (SARA)**: helps fund stewardship and restoration of protected resources on APR properties.

6. **Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA)**: business planning assistance and matching grants for farm improvements for beginning farmers between 1 and 5 years in business.

7. **Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP)**: conservation practices that prevent direct impacts on water quality, & ensure efficient use of water.

8. **The Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP)** supports agricultural operations efforts to reduce food safety risks.

Grant details are available at:  
[www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr)

## Grants & Funding Programs



If you own an APR you may be contacted by the Department to have a site visit, called a monitoring inspection. The Department uses these inspections to:

- Check compliance with APR terms
- Open communication with landowner
- Share updates on policies and grants
- Understand challenges

### Who does these inspections?

A monitoring inspection is conducted by either Department staff or field contractors hired by the Department.

### When do these inspections happen?

An inspection may occur annually, every few years, or as needed to verify field conditions, for example, prior to an approval.

### Does the owner need to be part of the inspection?

The landowner will be contacted in advance to arrange a time for the inspection. Landowners are encouraged to join the monitor for the inspection, but are not required to do so.

### What happens during an inspection?

- The monitor walks portions or the entire property, making field comparisons to earlier documentation
- Notes any changes in ag activities, land use, and structures

### What happens after an inspection?

After an inspection, the monitor will produce a monitoring report that notes the conditions of the property, any changes to the property, registry documents, and verification of the boundaries.

### Who do I contact for a monitoring inspection or a copy of baseline reports on my property?

Please contact:

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[Delia.Delongchamp@state.ma.us](mailto:Delia.Delongchamp@state.ma.us)

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## Thinking about selling land subject to an APR ?

If you are thinking about selling land subject to an APR and are not sure where to start or what to do, here are some quick suggestions:

- Review your APR Document (Can't find your APR? Call an APR Field Representative to request a copy)
- Some APRs contain a right of first refusal, or an option to purchase the land at agricultural value ("option"), or neither
- If there is a right of first refusal or an option there are specific procedures contained in those documents that must be followed (some example procedures that may apply: obtaining an appraisal, preparing a farm plan, drafting an offer letter)
- In addition the Department has published guidelines available here: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/land-use/agricultural-preservation-restriction-program-apr.html>
- It is advisable to contact an attorney to help you through not only the land sale process, but also the APR specific process
- APR Field Representatives are available to walk you through this process.



## Their Very Own Farm

On February 12, 2014, Peter and Lynn Reading became the proud owners of their very own farm. Peter and Lynn were able to purchase the historic 74 acre Hayward Dairy Farm, located in West Bridgewater due to the combined efforts of MDAR's APR Program, NRCS's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (RFPP), and the Trust for Public Land (TPL).

The Trust for Public Land purchased the property from Tara Realty Associates, a subsidiary of Tedeschi Food Shops, which has previously considered the land for several commercial developments. Following the purchase of the property by TPL, the Commonwealth purchased an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on the property. Once restricted with an APR, the land can only be used for farming and can only be sold in the future at agricultural value. The APR agricultural value allowed the Readings to purchase the property for a farm supported price.

Prior to purchasing C&C Reading Farm, LLC (new name for Hayward Farm), the Readings operated Billingsgate Farm. The couple rented farmland in several different towns and would spend much of their day traveling to access their plots.

Despite these obstacles, they grew their business from a small farm stand to a robust community farm. Their successful wholesale business includes sales to Whole Foods Market in the greater Boston area and other major grocery chains.

Since purchasing C&C Reading Farm, LLC they have cleared field edges, planted approximately 60 of the 74 acres, installed three wells, a greenhouse and working on erecting a farm stand. They are currently selling produce on site from a temporary farm stand.

"Farm land is becoming scarcer in Massachusetts and across the county because there is more money in big development," said Peter. "We struggled for more than 14 years to buy a farm, but everything was too expensive. Then we got the opportunity of a lifetime. This is really a dream come true for us."

The APR program is pleased to have played a part in helping Peter and Lynn realize their dream!

## APR Farm Benefits from APR Improvement Program

The APR Improvement Program (AIP) has been helping active, commercial agricultural operations on APR farms stay viable since the program was initiated in 2009. AIP provides business planning, technical assistance, and grants to farm businesses with farmland that has been protected with a state Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Over the past 7 years, 65 farms have participated in AIP, receiving a total of \$4,450,000 in grants (an average of \$68,142 per farm) and an average of approximately \$6,231 in technical assistance services per farm. One such farm is North Country Harvest in Westfield.

Michael Kosinski is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farmer and the owner/ operator of the 390 -acre grain operation in Westfield. Through his participation in AIP Michael received technical and business planning assistance as well as a \$50,000 AIP grant for infrastructure improvements. Depending upon the annual availability of funding, the program typically offers grant levels of either \$25,000, \$50,000 or \$75,000 to a participating farm with award levels based on APR acreage, agricultural significance of the operation, and planned use of funds.

Michael used the funds to purchase a new grain dryer, grain cleaner, and grain bin. The farm improvements have significantly improved the efficiency and profitability of his farm operation.

Michael is very appreciative of the Program, stating, *"I am not sure if I could have continued with the corn only operation based on prices and the marketplace. Between the financial planning assistance and the grant funds I received, AIP truly made this operation viable."*

Many types of farms have participated from across the state in AIP, including dairy farms, cranberry operations, nurseries, orchards, livestock operations, and vegetable operations.

Applications to the program are typically available in April of each year with completed applications due back in June. To be eligible to apply, applicants must have been actively operating a commercial farm for at least the past three years with farmland that has been in the APR program for at least three years. For more information, or to receive an application, contact Melissa Adams at [Melissa.L.Adams@state.ma.us](mailto:Melissa.L.Adams@state.ma.us) or 413-548-1904.







24.5kW PV System —Ag-Energy

Next Agricultural  
Lands Preservation  
Committee  
meeting:  
March 29, 2017  
10:00 AM  
DFG Westborough

For future APR  
information please  
subscribe to our  
email list at the  
[APR website](#).

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## SARA NEW GRANT PROGRAM FOR APR FARMS—MARCH 20, 2017 DEADLINE

The Department is offering a new program, called Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs, or SARA, to resolve stewardship issues and to restore active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through the APR Program.

The Department has made a long and consistent commitment to the preservation of farmland in Massachusetts. In keeping with that commitment, we have developed this Program to help improve the status and condition of land protected by an APR. The Program provides funding of up to \$25,000 per farm, along with a 15% required match by the participant, to pay for expenses directly associated with restoration of the protected resources on an APR farm property, or survey cost share.

The Program will help fund identified improvements that will help restore or enhance the protected land resources on an APR farm property which may include reclaiming inactive fields to active cropland use or reactivating cropland use that had been negatively impacted by erosion, flooding, or natural disasters. The need for restoration cannot be the result of inaction or lack of stewardship by the current owner.

There is currently an open application period for this program. Completed applications are due **by 4:00 P.M. on March 20, 2017**. For more information about the program, or for an application, go to: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/sara.html>

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## Energy Projects on APRs:

As mentioned in our first issue, MDAR receives many inquiries regarding the installation of energy projects on farms holding an APR. MDAR issued Certificates of Approval (COA) allow landowners to install both energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

A key consideration for an APR landowner to ask when considering a renewable energy project is if the project is for the primary purpose of agriculture. Renewable energy projects are eligible on an APR only if more than half of the energy generated is to be used directly on the land subject to the APR, i.e. for the primary purpose of agriculture, and that every effort is made to minimize farm land impact. For instance, this would include locating a solar system on building roofs, or non-productive farmland as a first choice. Similar to a proposed energy efficiency project, all proposed renewable energy projects must apply for and receive an APR COA prior to initiating any project.

MDAR also receives many inquiries regarding the implementation of large-scale, commercial solar projects on APR farmland. As noted, the primary intent of the Commonwealth under the APR program is to protect and preserve agricultural lands for agricultural use as well as ensure the land can be sold at fair market agricultural value. Such commercial scale solar projects are not consistent with the APR program's intent and cannot be considered as an agricultural structure and therefore are unable to receive an APR COA.

Generally, energy efficiency projects are an upgrade of existing equipment or the addition of new equipment that fall within the farm buildings and reduce the farm's energy use. Therefore, these are fairly straightforward projects that are primarily for the purpose of agriculture.

In 2016, MDAR awarded 22 grants totaling \$440,000 to Massachusetts farmers to install renewable energy systems and improve energy efficiency on farms through its Ag-Energy Grant Program

If you are interested in pursuing a project on your farm, or need details on the grant program, contact our Renewable Energy Specialist, Gerry Palano at [Gerald.Palano@state.ma.us](mailto:Gerald.Palano@state.ma.us) or (617) 626-1706. To request a COA Application please contact your Stewardship Planner.